

Michigan  
Department  
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Services

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# Articles in Today's Clips

**Tuesday, April 15, 2008**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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## 'It shouldn't hurt to be a child'

### New advocacy center provides safe haven for child abuse victims

By Jennifer Sattler  
Voice Reporter

After years of autumn weekends spent sitting on the roof of Birchwood Mall in an attempt to raise awareness and funds for the education and prevention of child abuse, the St. Clair County Child Abuse/Neglect Council now has a new roof of its own over its head.

As part of Child Abuse Prevention Month, the council is hosting a ribbon cutting and open house from 1 to 5 p.m. Monday at its newly remodeled Blue Water Child Advocacy Center, 1107 Military St., in Port Huron.

The public is invited to attend the open house and tour the new advocacy center.

"Our community partnership has made this dream very real. This long time goal was only realized due to the caring generosity of local foundations and generous individuals," Executive Director Sally Straffon said. "There are 30 advocacy centers throughout the state. The completion of this local facility has been a labor of love.

"The Council developed the advocacy center as an additional service component designed to facilitate forensic interviews with alleged sexually abused children. Interviews are now being conducted in our new state-of-the-art facility."

The stressful interviewing experience for alleged victims is reduced 10-fold with an interviewing room equipped with one-way glass. "It offers a wonderful way to interview victims," Straffon said.

Jean Sturtridge, president of the council's board, remembers a different time and place, where the interviewing process was very awkward. A former senior prosecutor for the county, Sturtridge remembers sitting through countless interviews with the victim, law enforcement, social workers, and prosecutors - all in one small room.

"We did a lot to make sure children were comfortable," Sturtridge said. "However, we always felt that wasn't enough."

Prior to joining the St. Clair County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Sturtridge was a prosecutor in Oakland County when the second CAREHOUSE for abuse victims was built.

"In January 1993, when I came to St. Clair County, we recognized there was

a tremendous need for a well-equipped facility," she said. It has been a long time coming.

"The Council has done a tremendous amount in our community to make this possible. This facility has been brought forth by a culmination of tireless effort and a community partnership. To be able to build little-by-little and store up equity...This is so exciting for us."

The council is welcoming three guests at the event. All are folks who have made a tremendous impact on child advocacy awareness.

Jack Kresnak was an award-winning reporter with the Detroit Free Press. He was recently named president and chief executive officer of Michigan's Children, a statewide independent voice for children and their families. The agency works with lawmakers, business leaders, and communities to make Michigan a place where all children have the opportunity to thrive. Kresnak was the lead reporter for the Free Press' Children's First Campaign.

"It's extremely important to have a comfortable setting for victims of abuse and neglect," Kresnak said. "It's so easy not to get to the bottom of a situation without having all of the facts and as important as police officers are to children, they can also be very intimidating."

Steven Yager is the director of the Office of the Family Advocate Department of Human Services. Yager has been a child advocate in Michigan's social service system since 1987. He plays an active role in child advocacy center developments statewide.

Jasmine Millwood, a 2007 Miss Michigan contestant, will share her personal history as a foster child. She will be featured at the 2008 National Convention for the Prevention of Child Abuse in May.

More than 28,000 children were victims of abuse in Michigan in 2007. In St. Clair County, more than 3,000 cases were reported. The council is working hard to reduce that number to zero.

"Not all interviewed will be victims," Kresnak said. "There could be a suspicion and it has not been sorted out by individuals who are specially trained. This neutral setting will enable the Council to provide an environment so children are not asked questions that are leading."

The council has been providing child abuse prevention and education services countywide since 1986.

There are several programs in place, including "Never Shake a Baby," "Babylonian Encounter," "Just the Facts," "The Care Fund," and the Family Resource Center.

The programs run the gamut for all ages. For example, the "Babylonian Encounter" is designed for elementary students, while "Just the Facts" is geared for middle school students. Sturtridge facilitates this district-wide program.

"Children need to listen to that little voice in their heads. If they question anything about inappropriate behavior from an adult, they need to confide in

an adult not their peers," Sturtridge said. "Parents need to realize there are plenty of individuals out there who are a threat to our children that haven't made the sex offender registry. By the time the alleged offender is in the courtroom, it's usually too late.

"These people aren't scary looking monsters as one would think. They are the average neighbor down the street who is well dressed and nice looking to a child. We must continue to educate our children and parents about the risks of sexual abuse."

The Care Fund is a special fund available for at-risk children. Any professional or adult working with children may request up to \$100 in a calendar year for a child's special needs such as shoes, sports fees, camp fees, haircuts, and more.

The Family Resource Center is a hands-on information accessible facility for both parents and professionals. Child Safety Trainings are offered to parents, community groups, churches, and child- serving agencies countywide.

"On April 14, when the new site is dedicated, so many courts, schools, officials, and law enforcement need to be recognized for their endless efforts," Strutridge said. "People see the need to nurture that child abuse is preventable. It shouldn't hurt to be a child."

For details, log onto [www.sccstopchildabuse.org](http://www.sccstopchildabuse.org) or call (810) 966-9911.

Click here to return to story:

[http://www.voicenews.com/stories/040908/loc\\_20080409003.shtml](http://www.voicenews.com/stories/040908/loc_20080409003.shtml)



## Shelby cop arrested, accused of beating wife

Couple allegedly fought after her birthday party.

By Frank DeFrank

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Shelby Township police officer faces criminal charges and his employment future is uncertain after his arrest over the weekend for allegedly assaulting his wife and threatening her with a gun. David Essad, 34, an 8-year veteran of the department, is charged with felonious assault and aggravated domestic violence. Police said Essad beat up his wife early Saturday morning during a quarrel as the couple returned from an evening celebrating her birthday. Mike McCabe, undersheriff for the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, said officers responding to a call found the couple in a parking lot on Rochester Road, near Tienken Road, about 12:15 a.m. Saturday. Mrs. Essad was inside the vehicle. Officers noted her hair, face and shirt were bloodied. Police said her injuries included a broken nose and hair pulled from her scalp. Her injuries were serious enough to require medical attention, and the Rochester Hills fire department transported her to Crittenton Hospital. Essad was lying on the ground with his arms stretched out as if surrendering, police said. Bond for Essad was set at \$20,000 with a provision that he could post 10 percent of the total to secure his release. He was also ordered placed on an electronic tether and was forbidden to possess any firearms. A preliminary examination is scheduled for April 22 before 52-3 District Court (Rochester Hills) Judge Nancy Carniak. Essad was placed on paid suspension by Shelby Township police pending an internal probe, said Capt. Stephen Stanbury. But Essad's future employment may rest with the results of the criminal case. If convicted of either of the principle charges against him, Essad would be denied the right to possess a weapon, which could effectively end his law enforcement career. "We really have nothing to do with the criminal aspect of it," said Stanbury. James Tagnanelli, president of the Police Officers Association of Michigan, the union that represents Shelby Township officers, said Essad will be provided representation in both the criminal proceedings and the department investigation "to make sure justice is served, whatever that might be." "Because of the circumstances (Essad was still in jail Monday afternoon), we haven't really had much chance to talk to him," Tagnanelli said. Essad is the third Shelby Township police officer to run afoul of the law in the past three years. In early 2005, a patrolman was found drunk and slumped over the wheel of an idling car in Macomb Township. The officer pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor and was sentenced to one year probation. He subsequently was suspended, but kept his job. Just three months ago, another officer was fired after she pleaded guilty to illegally disclosing information she obtained from a police computer network. The officer pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor charge and has filed a grievance challenging her discharge. Despite the incidents, township Supervisor Ralph Maccarone, a former Detroit police officer, praised the department as a whole. "Police officers are human beings like everybody else," he said. "We hold them to a higher

standard.”

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[http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/041508/loc\\_local04.shtml](http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/041508/loc_local04.shtml)

# **Cass County Prosecutor suggests couple shouldn't remain together**

By NORMA LERNER / Niles Daily Star

*Monday, April 14, 2008 10:42 AM EDT*

CASSOPOLIS - A White Pigeon man, who lived with his girlfriend in Edwardsburg, fought like cats and dogs and fought too many times.

Christopher Cliburn, 44, of 306 East Elkhart Road landed a 180-day jail term Friday in Cass County Circuit Court for third-offense attempted home invasion and a consecutive 270 days jail for third-offense domestic violence. He also was put on two years probation.

Prosecutor Victor Fitz told the court that Cliburn was on his fourth or fifth domestic violent conviction and continually blames his girlfriend, Rebecca Nielson for their quarreling. He doesn't acknowledge his drinking, Fitz said. The victim is foolhardy to remain with him. "She is a punching bag. He doesn't appear to correct it. He is headed for destruction."

Defense lawyer Phillip Harrison said Cliburn knows he and his girlfriend have a bad relationship. He said, it's like a mixture of fire and water. He realizes his behavior was inappropriate. Harrison said Cliburn has had seven operations and is in a lot of pain but needs to work because he has a \$148,000 contract to complete. He installs drainage in new building parking lots at malls. He agreed the couple should not be together again.

Before sentencing, Cliburn said he takes responsibility. He broke down saying his brother was killed recently in a bad accident. He knew Nielson had too much too drink, and things got out of hand. She got out of the car and walked to her apartment about two miles, he said.

Judge Michael Dodge said the couple had been out drinking on Sept. 1 at the Pleasant Lake Bar. She got out of the car and walked home and claimed Cliburn kicked in the front door and entered the apartment without her permission. She reported that Cliburn struck her when she called police.

Cliburn's fines and costs were \$1,530.

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# Group wants health care mandate on Nov. ballot

## UHS director says plan would reduce cost of coverage

**By: Julie Rowe, Daily Staff Reporter**

**Posted: 4/15/08**

State lawmakers could be forced to pass legislation that requires every Michigan resident has access to health care coverage, which would make Michigan the second state in the country to implement such a plan.

A proposed ballot initiative, called Health Care for Michigan, would amend the state's constitution to require lawmakers to ensure every resident has "comprehensive and affordable health care coverage through a fair and cost effective financing system."

If passed, the proposal would allow the state to make sure residents have health insurance through "public or private measures." The proposal does not set a deadline for lawmakers to enact a health care coverage mandate.

The Health Care for Michigan Campaign committee is circulating a petition to add the proposal to the November ballot.

The petition needs 380,126 signatures to get on the ballot, and organizers say it has garnered about 100,000 so far.

If the proposal is added to the ballot and a majority of voters support a constitutional amendment, Michigan residents would be required to have access to both preventative and primary care. Currently, Massachusetts is the only other state to require its residents have health insurance, having passed a mandate in 2006.

Frank Houston, deputy director of the campaign committee, said the initiative would push the Michigan Legislature to reform what he called a "broken health care system," but wouldn't require a specific policy.

"The purpose of this initiative is to create a little more urgency to this situation," he said.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Lt. Gov. John Cherry, both Democrats, have endorsed the proposal.

Bob Winfield, director of University Health Services, said the initiative would primarily benefit University students from Michigan who had inadequate health care coverage or none at all.

"For out-of-state students, I don't think this would have an impact," said Winfield.

Five percent of all undergraduates and 10 percent of all graduate students have no health insurance Winfield said. He said he wasn't sure how many out-of-state students were uninsured.

Earlier this month, Winfield spoke in support of the Michigan Student Assembly's resolution asking University administrators to consider requiring all students to have health insurance.

The University's insurance plan costs \$2,183 per year. A decade ago, the same plan cost only \$621.

MSA Vice President Arvind Sohoni, who chaired MSA's Health Issues Commission last year and supports a health care requirement for University students, said he also supports adding a health care coverage mandate to the state's constitution.



"It kind of comes from the same school of thinking that uninsured people are at a big disadvantage," Sohoni said. "The goal is to reduce the cost. With more healthy people, costs will go down."

Though he supports putting the initiative on the ballot, Sohoni said he was concerned that the proposed language lacks a specific policy.

Marjorie Mitchell, a Health Care for Michigan campaign committee member, said the committee wants to pressure the Michigan Legislature to develop a plan, she said. The state's constitution, she said, isn't the place to draft specific legislation.

"We don't have a specific plan that we are promoting," she said. "We are promoting a set of principles which we think makes sense in the health care reform debate for the people of Michigan."

The proposal doesn't specify a time period for legislators to draft a statewide health care plan, but if the process took longer than two years, Mitchell said, the committee "might need to put some more pressure on."

Brady Smith, chair of the University's chapter of College Republicans, said the initiative was unnecessary and probably wouldn't be effective if implemented. He said he was wary of giving lawmakers a broad mandate that doesn't guarantee that care would be high-quality and affordable.

"It doesn't have any real teeth to it," Smith said. "This is binding legal language and that'd be a nightmare for the courts to try to enforce."

Smith said he plans to evaluate the proposal with members of the College Republicans before his group takes a stance on the initiative.

LSA sophomore Nathaniel Eli Coats Styer, chair of the University's chapter of College Democrats, said his organization has gathered about 200 signatures for the petition at group meetings and from students in Mason Hall.

"It's a great, positive movement forward for universal health care in the state of Michigan," Styer said. "We look forward to campaigning for it in November if it gets on the ballot."

# Volunteers make sure taxpayers get refunds

by Rod Smith | Special to the Gazette  
Tuesday April 15, 2008, 9:30 AM



Rod Smith | Special to the Gazette

Kaitlin Mellema, a Lawton High School senior, works on a tax form for Ruby Farrow of Lawton at the Antwerp Township Activity Center Monday as part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistant Program.

By Rod Smith  
Special to the Gazette

MATTAWAN -- When Ruby Farrow got help filing her tax return Monday, she also learned she could get a rebate on her property taxes and that she was eligible for a home-heating credit.

Farrow, of Lawton, was helped by Kaitlin Mellema, a high school senior who over the past two years has done 70 tax returns through a tax-assistance program.

"It makes me feel good to show them that they can get the money they didn't even know they could get," Mellema said.

Mellema, a senior at Lawton High School who takes business classes at the Van Buren Technology Center, joined her fellow volunteers Monday at the Antwerp Township Activity Center aiding people who were pressed to meet today's deadline to file tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service.

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistant Program is overseen by Tom Richardson, business-development coordinator of the Van Buren Technology Center. Richardson said it's fairly typical for the program's tax preparers to show seniors other credits for which they are eligible.

The first two seniors who had their taxes done Monday also received Michigan Tax Credits of \$1,200 apiece.

"They had no idea they were eligible," Richardson said. "They were told they were on Social Security, so they shouldn't file taxes."

In one case, a man had three kids, worked three jobs and made \$7,000.

Richardson said the man had never thought it was worth his time to file.

"When we put all the W-2s together, he was eligible for almost \$3,800," Richardson said.

The program just received a Michigan Civic Star Award from the American Association of School Administrators.

Also part of the program are the Tri-County Head Start, Michigan Department of Human Services, Chemical Bank, the IRS, South Haven Area Senior Services and the Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency.

## **DHS Academy honored**

By [Dan Armstrong](#)

NBC 25

Posted: Tuesday, April 15, 2008 at 11:06 a.m.

LANSING -- For the second consecutive year, the Michigan Department of Human Services Leadership Academy has been selected as one of the Top 50 programs in the 2008 Innovations in American Government Awards competition. These honorees are among the top 5 percent of the initial applicant pool.

The DHS Leadership Academy selects high potential leaders and accelerates their development through a two-year intensive program to prepare them for high level positions at DHS. Academy participants are trained in a broad range of leadership competencies rather than groomed for particular positions.

"Investing in our staff to prepare future leaders is one way we can help put Michigan back on track," DHS Director Ismael Ahmed said. "We can provide better service to the people of Michigan when leaders are prepared to take on additional responsibilities."

A total of 88 DHS employees have graduated from the Leadership Academy since its inception in 2001. An additional 24 employees are currently enrolled in the 2006 academy. A selection process is under way to pick the candidates for the 2008 academy. A total of 32 academy members have been promoted since entering the program.

DHS, like most organizations, is projected to lose many of its top leaders to retirement in the next three to five years. Currently 45 percent of DHS top leaders are eligible for retirement, and 75 percent will be eligible within five years.

"To be included among the Top 50 innovative programs for the second year in a row shows our program is on the cutting edge by developing leaders of tomorrow," said Bill Patrick, director of the DHS Office of Professional Development.

The Innovations in American Government Program, administered by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, is a significant force in recognizing and promoting excellence and creativity in the public sector. By highlighting exemplary models of government's innovative performance, the program serves as a catalyst for continued progress in addressing the nation's most pressing public concerns. Each final winner is eligible to receive a grant of \$100,000 to be directed toward replication and dissemination activities.

For more information about the awards program, go to [www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu](http://www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu)

For more information about DHS, go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394 or Renee Fluker (313) 456-1236

## **Wayne County opens food assistance change reporting center**

### **Center's goal is to improve service for food assistance recipients and cut errors**

April 15, 2008

DETROIT - People receiving food assistance benefits in Wayne County can now use a toll-free number to report changes in their household that impact eligibility for assistance.

The Wayne County Department of Human Services Change Reporting Center debuted today and will process all changes in households that affect a family's eligibility for assistance programs. Individuals can call 1-877-272-6999 and report any changes affecting their benefits, including address, income, employment, family size, utilities, child support or child care.

The specialty center was developed to improve customer service. Wayne County has more than 173,000 active food assistance cases. In comparison, Oakland and Macomb counties have 31,000 and 33,000 respectively. Ingham County has more than 18,000 cases, and Kent County has more than 32,000 cases.

"By centralizing the change reporting, we can improve our accuracy and timelines to help eligible families receive benefits for which they qualify," DHS Director Ismael Ahmed said.

The center will be open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and is staffed with 40 individuals, 30 of whom are dedicated to take phone calls and perform changes to case files. Callers will be able to leave a name, case number and telephone number requesting a return call after business hours. In other counties, individual DHS specialists are responsible for taking calls from families and logging changes. This practice will continue in other counties.

In addition to improving accuracy, the centralized change center operation will allow Wayne County DHS staff to focus on other issues and see more new individuals seeking assistance.

For more information go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Colleen Steinman (517) 373-7394

## **DHS Leadership Academy among nation's top government innovations**

April 15, 2008

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